

United States Mint
Carson St., between Robinson
and Caroline Streets
Carson City
Nevada

HABS NO. NEV-13-22 HABS

NEV.

13. CARCI

20-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. NEV-13-22

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)

Location: On block bordered by Carson, Caroline, Curry, and Robinson Streets (building faces east on Carson), Carson City, Nevada

Present Owner: State of Nevada

Present Occupant: Nevada State Museum

Present Use: Museum and offices of Nevada State Museum

Statement of Significance: This was the first building designed by Alfred B. Mullett after his appointment as Supervising Architect to the Treasury Department in 1866. The structure has important historical associations, and in spite of a current usage far different from its original, the building is largely in original condition.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The plans, specifications and authorization papers for the construction of the mint arrived in Carson City on July 17, 1866. Ground was broken the next day at 8:00 a.m., and the cornerstone laid on September 24, 1866. Delays in appropriations, labor disputes, high costs, etc. plagued the construction, but on December 13, 1869, after an inspection, the architect pronounced the building completed to his satisfaction.

2. Architect:

Alfred Bult Mullett (1834-1890) served as Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department from 1866 until 1874. His tenure of office coincided with an accelerated government building program following the Civil War, and Mullett was responsible for the design of many public buildings in cities and towns throughout the country. The buildings erected by the Treasury Department while Mullett held the office of Supervising Architect are unexcelled by any American structures of their time in scale and solidity of construction.

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 2

Mullett was born in Taunton, England on April 7, 1834. In 1843 his family emigrated to the United States, settling in Glendale, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. Mullett received his academic training in Ohio and Europe, and in 1860 was employed in the office of the noted Greek Revival architect, Isaiah Rogers, who had moved to Cincinnati in 1848. Rogers became Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department in 1862 and brought Mullett to Washington as a member of his staff. Mullett's rise in rank was rapid, and in 1866 Secretary of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch appointed him to the post of Supervising Architect.

Mullett inherited the classical tradition of Federal building from his predecessor and mentor, Rogers. In Washington he completed Robert Mill's Treasury Building by adding a north wing, adhering closely to the style in which Ammi B. Young and Rogers had built the south and west wings. Mullett's Post Office and Courthouse in Portland, Maine and his Custom House in Portland, Oregon also reflect the style which had become so identified with government buildings of the young nation.

The Old San Francisco Mint has been adjudged Mullett's most important work in the Classic Revival style. In fineness of detail and quality of construction, it carried on the principles which had influenced public building for over 30 years. As the last major example of Classic Revival architecture, the Mint signaled the end of an era in American monumental architecture.

Mullett also worked in the more elaborate and decorative style of the Second French Empire. As Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, he was responsible for many Federal buildings executed in this lavish style including post offices in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and St. Louis and buildings elsewhere including assay offices, custom houses, and hospitals.

The former State, War, and Navy Building was the grandest edifice erected in Washington, D.C. in the Second French Empire style and was rivalled elsewhere in the nation only by John McArthur, Jr.'s Philadelphia City Hall. The State, War, and Navy, now the Executive office building, was the capstone of Mullett's career. However, personal conflicts during the building's long period of construction eventually

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 3

led to Mullett's resignation and the end of his career of public service. He continued in private architectural practice in Washington, D.C. until October 20, 1890, when he took his life in a fit of despondency over the failure to receive compensation claimed for his work, done many years earlier, on the State, War, and Navy Building.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The United States Mint is built on Block no. 65 of Proctor and Green's Division of Carson City. (Frank M. Proctor and B.F. Green were two of the four original purchasers in 1858 of the Eagle Ranch, upon which Carson City was platted). The following references to this block are from the Ormsby County, Nevada Deed Books:

1863: Deed September 22, 1863, recorded in Book 5, page 196. The United States of American purchased the South half of block 65 from Moses Job and Margaret Job, his wife.

Deed September 28, 1863, recorded in Book 5, page 199. The United States of America purchased the North half of Block 65 from James L. Riddle.

1865: Deeds, May 3, 1865 and June 19, 1865 recorded in Book 9, pages 185, 186. Reaffirmations by Riddle and Job of the 1863 sale.

1939: Deed, December 8, 1939, recorded in Book 46, pages 169-174. The State of Nevada purchased Block 65 from the United States for \$5,000 for the Nevada Museum and Art Institute, it having been declared that there was no further Federal need for the building.

4. Original Plans, construction, etc.: Many of the original drawings, both for the building and the mint machinery housed therein, are preserved in the Nevada State Museum. A partial list of the drawings - furnished by the museum - is as follows:

1. Originals and prints - Basement, first and Second floors, U.S. Mint
2. Mint Building - elevations
3. Machinery plans
4. Tanks, shops, etc.

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 4

5. Tank plans
6. Engine windows and tank
7. Window details
8. Minting furnaces
9. Annealling furnace
10. Annealling furnace tile
11. Engine and Boiler room
12. Crystalizing vat
13. Blank furnace
14. Floor Plans of Mint by Howard Hickson (done recently, based on original plans. These are reproduced in Mr. Hickson's book, Mint Mark: "CC")

Also in this collection are plans for the carpenter shop and blacksmith shop, which have been reproduced for the HABS collection.

Construction began on the Mint on July 18, 1866, and the Carson Daily Appeal prophesied that the building would be completed by winter. However, the initial construction took over three years to complete.

Abraham Curry, Superintendent of Construction, first hired Chinese laborers to do the work, but was forced under pressure from the townspeople to hire Occidentals at a far higher rate. By the winter of 1866-67, only the footings, extending seven feet below the basement floor, had been laid. Work was suspended until April 9, 1867, because of the severe Nevada winters. When it was resumed, work proceeded rapidly, and the roof was on by December. However, finances were in a precarious state, and on December 5, Curry left for Washington to plead for more funds for the building and its machinery. He was successful in his efforts and by the summer of 1868, the interior cabinet work was being completed. Most of the machinery arrived in November 1868, and by the end of that year, all that remained to be built was the chimney stack. The fire brick had arrived too late for construction that winter; consequently the stack was not finished until the spring of 1869. On November 1, 1869, Curry, who had by now become Superintendent of the Mint itself, in addition to being superintendent of its construction, made a test of the machinery, and found it to be operational. In December, Architect Mullett pronounced the building complete.

The Mint is constructed of sandstone blocks from the Nevada State Prison Quarry, (which had been opened originally by

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 5

Curry). The common brick, used in interior partitions, the cupola, etc. came from the Adams Brick Works in nearby Genoa, Nevada. Fire brick for the furnaces and stacks was ordered from England. By the end of 1869, the total expenditure on the structure was \$426,787.66.

Thompson and West, in their History of Nevada give the following description of the Mint and its construction:

"Granite from the prison stone quarry. Pict (sic) style of architecture. Portico, Ionic. Hall, twelve feet in width; main hall 12 x 40; on the right of the entrance. Paying Teller's office, 13 x 16 feet. Coining room, 19 x 19. Spiral staircase conducts above. Whitening room, 10 x 14 1/2 with a vault in solid masonry 5 x 6. Annealing furnace and rolling room, 17 x 24. Gold and silver melting room, 10 x 24. Melters and refiner's office, 12 x 19 feet. Deposit melting room, 14 1/2 x 19. Deposit weighing room, 19 x 19, with a strong vault 6 1/2 x 10 1/2 feet. Treasurers' office, 13 x 16, with a vault five feet square. Engine room, 16 1/2 x 53 feet. Beside which there is a cabinet, adjusting room, ladies' dressing room, watchman's room two store-rooms attic, basement. As a preventive against fire the floors are double, with an inch of mortar between. The foundations are seven feet below the basement floor and laid in concrete. Building two and a half stories high."

5. Alterations and Additions: In his report to the Treasury Department on December 13, 1869, Mullett, while announcing the building completed, noted that additions would be needed in the near future. In November 1873, the Director of the United States Mint came to Carson City from Washington to investigate the possibility of enlarging the facility. He recommended immediate expansion, but funds for the addition were not yet forthcoming. However, early in 1874, the Superintendent of the Carson City Mint added new tanks, furnaces, and chimneys, and was able to double the refinery's output. In 1875, another Washington official inspected the facility and recommended its enlargement, and again no funds were appropriated. In January 1876, the Superintendent of The Mint went to Washington to seek funding. He got Representative Woodburn of Nevada to introduce a bill requesting \$200,000 for the purpose, but the bill was defeated.

Finally, in October 1878, work on the addition was begun. The old boiler room was demolished and a 64' x 27' stone wing added in its stead. The addition housed a new and enlarged

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 6

boiler room, an engine room, carpentry shop, and store-room. The addition, in 1878, was only one story in height. In September 1881, construction was commenced on a second floor to the rear wing, to house a new refinery. This was completed in November 1881.

The Carson City Mint was made an Assay Office in 1899, and remained so until 1933. It was then used by the United States Government as an office for the Works Project Administration. In 1939, the building was sold to the State of Nevada for Museum usage.

The Mint was first remodelled for museum use in 1941. Work began on February 2 and the building was dedicated and opened to the public in October. The "remodelling" consisted primarily of repairing and renovating, rather than completely altering the building. The original iron shutters, the granite stairway, vaults, etc. were left in place. In 1959 the Clark J. Guild Hall, containing additional exhibit space, was built to the southwest of the building; directly behind the main block and south of the rear wing, with which it shared a common wall. In 1971 the rear wing which had been added in 1878-81 was demolished and replaced by the John W. Calhoun Annex, which includes both exhibit areas and administrative offices of the museum. Stone from the demolished rear wing (which is also sandstone from the Nevada State Prison Quarry), was used in a wall around the parking lot on the northwest corner of the block, as coping for the annex, and also in the new Ormsby House Hotel in Carson City. The Nevada State Museum has the plans for the work done in 1959, in 1971, and for the earlier remodelling work done on the Mint building itself, as follows:

Plans for 1958 addition
Loose sheets, C.J. Guild Annex
Preliminary plans - Structural and safety construction
Safety corrections 1961
Safety survey report - John Webster Brown
Proposed Annex, 1964 (North annex)
Floor plans visitor's guide
NSM Heating system
Heating plans, first and second floors
Floor plans, second floor
Remodelling Mint Building
Basement plans
Floor Plans for NSM, 1st and 2nd floor
New Annex negatives and prints, 1964-

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)

HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 7

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Many historic personages are involved in the story of the Carson City Mint. The first superintendent, who had earlier been the Superintendent in charge of building, was Abraham Curry, the founder of Carson City (see A. Curry House, HABS No. NEV-13-13). Instrumental in having the Mint established were Nevada's first two Senators, William B. Stewart and James W. Nye (see Stewart-Nye House, HABS No. NEV-13-12).

A list of the Superintendents of the Carson City Mint and the years in which they were appointed, is found on page 104 of Mint Mark "CC" (see bibliographical information below). The same volume also lists, on page 102, all of the first employees of the mint.

Perhaps the most famous, or infamous, "event" connected with the structure was the scandal of 1895, during which it was revealed that some \$75,000 had been taken from the mint by several employees. Details of the affair are told both in Mint Mark "CC" and in Davis' The History of Nevada. See also U.S. Post Office. (HABS No. NEV-13-8) where the subsequent trial took place.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: The Nevada State Museum has many photographs, exterior and interior, in both the Mint and Nevada State Museum files. An excellent series of interior photographs, taken in 1895, 1896, and used as exhibits in the case of "The United States vs. Henry Piper," is included.

The Nevada Historical Society in Reno also has many early photographs of the building. An early exterior view is found facing page 987 of Davis' The History of Nevada.

2. Bibliography:

Davis, Sam. P., ed., The History of Nevada, Reno: The Elms Publishing Co., 1913.

Hickson, Howard, Mint Mark: "CC" (Popular Series, No. 4, Nevada State Museum). Carson City: Nevada State Museum 1972

A History of Public Buildings Under the Control of The Treasury Department. Washington: Government Printing Office 1901.

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 8

Thompson, Thomas H., and West, Albert A., History of Nevada. Berkeley: Howell-North, 1958. (Facsimile reprint of this volume which was originally published in 1881.)

Wodehouse, Lawrence, "Alfred B. Mullett and his French Style Government Building" in Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, March 1972, Vol. XXXI, No. 1.

Wren, Thomas, ed., A History of The State of Nevada, Its Resources and People. New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1904

Prepared by: S. Allen Chambers, Jr.
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
December 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: The old Mint at Carson City is a late nineteenth-century building of a type which is very rare. It is largely preserved in its original state. The condition of the fabric of this two-story, cruciform-plan building is good.
- B. Description of Exterior:
1. Overall dimensions: The main building is 58' (five bays) x 88' (seven bays), with a 12' x 15' entrance porch. The original west wing is 27' x 86'.
 2. Foundations: The foundations are about six feet high constructed of rock-faced random ashlar sandstone laid in four courses including a plain projecting water table.
 3. Walls: The random ashlar sandstone is mostly rock-faced but dressed in some areas. Edges are drafted. Near the corners, the courses vary in height from about 1'-0" to 1'-3" infilled occasionally with smaller courses.

A string course at the second floor level consists of a rock faced course with a beveled moulding beneath it.

Projecting gabled central pavilions are on the east and west elevations through that of the west is nearly hidden by a modern addition.

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 9

4. Entrance Porch: The single bay porch located at the center of the east front and is one story high above a platform having eight granite steps on each of three sides. At each front corner a massive pier, L-shaped in plan is composed of coupled Tuscan pilasters, with echinus moulded capitals, on rock-faced pedestals. The piers, are spanned by a stilted segmental arches on each elevation. Between the Tuscan capitals and the cornice the wall is plain. The cornice consists of a corona supported by a bevel moulding which conforms to the height of the string course along the main wall. Above the corona there is a simple three-part parapet without pedestals. The stonework of this porch is dressed, except as noted. The ceiling is matched and beaded boarding.
5. Chimneys: A number of chimneys once projected above the roof, along the perimeter of the building, as seen in old photographs. These have all been removed above roof line. There was also a massive tall chimney on axis on the west wall; this, too, is no longer visible, although the lower portion remains, at the first story inside the building.
6. Openings:
 - a. Entrance doorway: The high opening is spanned with a segmental arch and is framed by wooden architrave trim. The jambs and soffit are faced with plain wooden paneling. The double doors below a wooden transom bar, are recessed and are modern replacements.
 - b. Windows: First and second story windows are similar with semicircular-arched openings. The voussoirs bond with the ashlar of the wall. Sills are plain and are dressed on the face with a wide 9 or 10-toothed chisel. The lower sash contain six lights; the upper sash, extending into the arched head, contain eight lights. The one at the center has a round head below the top two quadrant lights. The basement windows openings, which are segmentally arched, are blocked with masonry.

At the central pavilion of the east elevation the windows are grouped in pairs. A lunette window is in the pediment of this pavilion

7. Roof:

- a. The roof shape and covering is hipped with gables at the east and west pavilions. It is covered with composition shingles.
- b. Cornice: A bracketed cornice consists of a plain projecting course of dressed sandstone below the lower end of dressed stone, cyma reversa profile brackets, two courses of rock-faced stone high. The brackets have a small ovolo-moulded cap which receives the cornice of a conventional form: a cyma recta above a corona.
- c. Cupola: A brick cupola above the roof is placed on the main axis somewhat forward (east) of the secondary axis of the building. Three semicircular-arched windows on each elevation contain double-hung sash with six over four lights. It is crowned by a large wooden cornice, with a prominent dentil course, and a low pyramidal roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Plans:

- a. First Floor: The plan is symmetrical; a series of rooms around the perimeter are served by a rectangular central stair hall, which is entered on the east through a large vestibule. The function of these rooms is given on a floor plan displayed in the museum, showing the allocation of spaces between 1866 and 1878. The treasurer's office was just south of the vestibule. This office connected with the first of three rooms, the deposit weighing room along the south side. To the west were the deposit melting room and the melter's and refiner's office.

On the north side of the vestibule was the paying teller's office, which opened into the first of three rooms, the coining room, along the north side. Behind the coining room was the whitening room, then the coiner's office. At the center of the west side, behind the stair, were two rooms: the north annealing and rolling room; and the south gold and silver melting room.

- b. Second Floor: The floor plan is similar except that

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 11

there was a room above the entrance vestibule, and a single room, the refinery, is at the west.

At the center of the east side was the clerk's office; adjoining this to the north was the superintendent's office, and to the south the watchman's room. Along the south side were the assayer's weighing room, the assayer's cupelling and boiling room, and the humid assay and store room. Along the north side were the adjusting room, cabinets, and store room.

- c. Basement floor: This layout was similar to the others.
 - d. West wing: This wing was a single story in height. It contained an engine room, boiler room, carpentry shop and store room.
2. Present state of the interior: The rooms described above are still intact. The refinery on the second floor has been divided by a partition. The space has been adapted to museum displays, so that a number of walls and openings have been hidden from view; modern doors and lighting have been installed though very little of the original building has been removed. The basement is occupied by a display mine.
 3. Stairway: This is a straight flight of twenty-eight risers, each 7" in height. The floor to floor height is approximately 16'-4". The steps are solid granite with moulded nosing. There is an open string. A very large moulded handrail is supported on heavy, turned balusters, two per tread. The railing continues around the stair well at the second floor and terminates at the first floor at a large round newel. Below the stair is an enclosed basement stairway.
 4. Interior finish: Old photographs on display in the museum indicate that office walls were plastered and that the stonework was exposed in the refinery and similar work rooms. Except for the walls in halls, which are plastered, the other rooms have composition board covering the walls and ceilings today. Floors are covered with modern composition tile. Visible original trim consists of a wide wooden base, 1'-1" high with a moulding above a plinth; architrave trim resting on a plinth and paneled door reveals; cavetto-moulded caps above windows; moulded window stools; vertical matched and beaded wainscoting with moulded cap rail (the height is about 4'-6" in the hall), plain trim on some second-floor

UNITED STATES MINT (NOW NEVADA STATE MUSEUM)
HABS No. NEV-13-22 Page 12

doorways; iron or steel interior shutters, many of which remain; and heavy iron or steel vault doors in various offices.

D. Site and Surroundings:

This building occupies an entire block and faces east on North Carson Street. The area is commercial. The terrain is level.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee
Supervising Architect
National Park Service
Date of visit: August 20, 1972

PART III. Project Information

These records are part of the documentation made during the latter half of 1972 and the summer of 1973 in a project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Nevada State Park System to record structures in Carson City and nearby areas.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Eric R. Cronkhite, Administrator, Nevada State Park System, and Mrs. Marshall Humphreys of the Nevada Landmarks Society assisted the HABS recorders in Nevada. Professor Harley J. McKee, Supervisory Architect, National Park Service, selected the subjects and provided architectural data for the sixteen Carson City structures which were recorded. Historical documentation for these buildings was prepared by S. Allen Chambers, Jr., Architectural Historian, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor for the 1973 Nevada Summer Team, which produced the measured drawings, was Robert L. Hartwig of Harvard University. Student assistant architects were John T. M. Creery (University of Utah), Robert P. Mizell (University of Florida), and Jack W. Schafer (University of Cincinnati). Photographs were made by Aaron A. Gallup of Sacramento, California.